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House of Representatives

The House met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. DOLD).

DESIGNATION OF THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
December 16, 2011.

I hereby appoint the Honorable ROBERT J. DOLD to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

JOHN A. BOEHNER,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Patrick J. Conroy, offered the following prayer: Eternal God, we give You thanks for giving us another day. We pause in Your presence and ask guidance for the men and women of the people's House.

Enable them, O God, to act on what they believe to be right and true and just, and to do so in ways that show respect for those with whom they disagree. In this, may they grow to be models and good examples in a time when so many in our world are unable to engage gracefully with those with whom they are at odds.

May the Members realize that Your congregation is wider and broader than ever we could measure or determine. Help them, and help us all, O Lord, to put away any judgments that belong to You and do what we can to live together in peace.

As we approach this next recess, bless our great Nation, and keep it faithful to its ideals, its hopes, and its promise of freedom in our world.

Bless us this day and every day, and may all that is done within the people's House be for Your greater honor and glory.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. WILSON) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair will entertain up to five requests for 1-minute speeches on each side of the aisle.

CHRISTMAS IN ATHENS, TEXAS

(Mr. POE of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, in the piney woods of east Texas, the small town of Athens in Henderson County is getting ready for the holidays. A group of local volunteers with Keep Athens Beautiful has placed a nativity scene on the far corner of the courthouse square. It has been there for the last 10 years with no complaints from residents.

But a group of out-of-towners, not from Athens, not even from Texas, but from a thousand miles away in Wisconsin, have self-righteously objected to the nativity scene. The antireligious hate group demands baby Jesus be evicted from the courthouse lawn.

The county judge politely said no local citizen has complained about the scene, and he really doesn't care what somebody from Wisconsin thinks. He even invited other religious groups to use the courthouse square, but no one has asked to do so.

The county officials don't appear to be succumbing to the intimidation tactics of the bigoted group that wants to censor religion. County commissioner Joe Hall made it clear: "We will remove the nativity scene when hell freezes over. It's not going anywhere."

And that's just the way it is.

EXTEND UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION AND PAYROLL TAX CUT

(Mr. CICILLINE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. CICILLINE. Mr. Speaker, Congress should not be waiting until the 11th hour to act on behalf of the American people. And yet here we are with the Federal emergency unemployment compensation program and the payroll tax cut scheduled to end in just a couple of weeks, which will cause tremendous harm to the American people.

This holiday, thousands of Rhode Islanders are wondering whether they will be able to afford to stay in their homes, afford to go grocery shopping, and whether they will be able to afford their heating and electricity bills. Americans are being left with real uncertainty because of the failure of this body to act responsibly.

It's a shame that extending emergency unemployment compensation and the payroll tax cut have become the latest victims of partisan politics. But it's not too late to act to provide families with a measure of assurance that they will be able to meet their basic necessities in the weeks to come.

I've heard from many of my constituents about the devastating impact that

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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